MARYLAND FOOD BANK

newsletter

SUMMER 2026

Creating Safe Spaces in More Places

A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT & CEO

MEG KIMMEL

Because of your support, neighbors in every community across Maryland can turn to a reliable network of trusted partners for food, and for help supporting their families when times get tough.

Meeting a neighbor's immediate need matters. It's essential. And it's also just one part of a much bigger picture that is coming into focus at the Maryland Food Bank.

Across the country, food banks are rethinking what this work can and should be. The question is no longer just how we provide food, but how we support neighbors and communities in building something more stable and enduring. For us, that comes down to an ambitious goal: how we build a food-secure Maryland.

The answer starts simply by centering neighbors with aspirations, insights, and a clear sense of what it takes to move forward in their own lives. When we listen, and when we align around what neighbors are asking for, a different kind of work becomes possible.

Real stability is built through access, resources, and opportunity working together. That means investing in approaches we know make a difference. We support partners in expanding services beyond food and in creating access to multiple resources at once. We also back efforts that address the root causes of food insecurity.

All of this is grounded in the understanding that communities know best what they need. The goal is to build solutions that are effective in the moment and durable over time because they are shaped by that insight.

We are already seeing this approach take shape through our Network Partners — the community-based organizations that serve as food access points across Maryland. Through our grant program, we support these partners in improving their physical spaces and building their capacity to expand what they offer to neighbors.

Thanks to your support, this work is growing in real and tangible ways. Since 2019, our grant program has supported more than 675 partner-led improvement projects. Across these sites, our partners are increasingly attuned to what neighbors need and ready to connect them to additional support in ways that feel seamless, welcoming, and respectful. We're seeing similar progress across other parts of our work as well, and we can't wait to share more with you in the months ahead.

This is how we build lasting relationships that support neighbors and strengthen communities over time.

Meg Kimmel

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MFB IN THE NOW

From Neighbor in Need to Advocate in Action

While walking back to her car with her toddler in one arm and a bag of groceries in the other, Sarah Golden did not realize she was actually taking the first steps on her pathway out of hunger. During her stop at a Mobile Market, she was able to access food but also connect to social services in a safe space.

Today, Sarah still attends Mobile Market events, but is now employed as the Community Health Outreach Coordinator for the Kent County Health Department. Now "on the other side of the line," Sarah is very mindful about the experience that her neighbors have when they seek out wraparound services, like health care, transportation assistance, or legal support.

"I just want to take away like the stigma and shame people might feel. If someone had done that for me, I wouldn't have felt like a failure, and would have gone sooner," she said.

Our Summer Club Program offers families trusted neighborhood destinations where kids can feel happy and safe engaging in arts and crafts, sports, and other activities when school is out of session. Kids receive nutritious meals and snacks made fresh daily by professional Maryland Food Bank chefs in the Charles T. Bauer Community Kitchen. Last year, kids enjoyed more than 85,000 meals at 45 Summer Club sites.

DID YOU KNOW?

Library Partnerships are Making it Easier on Families

We're always seeking ways to reduce the time and effort it takes a neighbor to get food and resources. That's why library partnerships—putting healthy food where neighbors already are—make so much sense! Neighbors in Highlandtown can shop at the highly accessible and welcoming Pratt Free Market, while food-insecure Marylanders in Cecil and St. Mary's Counties are responding positively to MFB's Mobile Market teaming up with Mobile Libraries in convenient community locations on a regular basis to provide an array of food and wraparound services.

SPRINGBOARD

MFB Partner since 2022

47,750+ Meals Shared in FY25

Robust Wraparound Services

SAFE SPACES

Starting with Food, Fueling Hope

"To me, Springboard is a safe space: quiet, low-pressure, non-anxiety-spiking, with a cool, calm, and collected culture."

Ke'Shawn Smith first encountered Springboard Community Services four years ago, when he was 18, and homeless. Springboard, one of the Maryland Food Bank's 760 community-based partners, is using food as the foundation to build connections that can change lives.

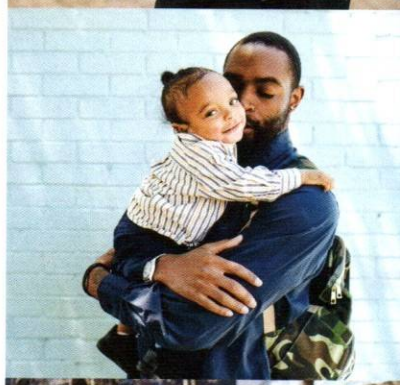
"I had been looking for a secure enough place to ensure that I could work towards having the resources to have a place to call my own, when I came to get something to eat and use the drop-in services at Springboard," he said. Ke'Shawn found the environment to be more comfortable than he expected.

"It really felt welcoming, and they took me in. No forced conversations or actions, and the seating was wide open, so I could comfortably read, which I like to do."

After receiving food and toiletries, Ke'Shawn was able to shower and wash his clothes. "It made me want to open up, not a lot of places I can say that about!"

Today, Ke'Shawn feels more hopeful about his future. "I'm not sure where I would be without Springboard. I feel like I have options now."

With Springboard's focus on maintaining a safe space, the future is bright for younger neighbors in Northwest Baltimore.



While the term "safe space" originated from LGBTQ communities in Los Angeles, it gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s in the women's movement. Today, most people use the phrase to describe places that are free of judgement, and welcoming to all.

Community-based partners that create dignified, welcoming experiences help neighbors access more than food. By connecting people to resources, opportunities, and support, these trusted spaces help build pathways toward greater stability and a more food-secure Maryland.

NEW POSSIBILITIES

Now Powered by Community

At City of Refuge, food is a gateway to forming relationships that tap the richness of the community.

By co-locating social services with access to nutritious food, City of Refuge has created one of the most comprehensive safe spaces in the state, located in Baltimore's Brooklyn neighborhood.

Once neighbors know they can find nutritious food, they also realize they can use the space and the resources there to build pathways out of hunger.

FROM PUSHING DRUGS TO PUMPING IRON

One of those neighbors is Corey Jenkins. "I had no fear of the police and would probably still be dealing drugs if not for City of Refuge," said Corey.

Director of Workforce Development Daniel Burgess, who was mentoring Corey's son, saw an opportunity for not only Corey's family, but the entire Brooklyn neighborhood.

Daniel shared, "We had this space, but the community wasn't buying in. I knew of Corey's passion for being fit and his reputation, so I reached out to see if he was interested and redirecting his influence for positive community impact, by running our gym."

City of Refuge had recently begun an employment incubator program, in direct response to community feedback—a perfect fit for Corey's goals.

"My initial plan was to go into real estate, but being shot at shifted my mindset. Daniel and City of Refuge provided the battery pack and focus needed to make the gym, ActivCor, happen—and all in a place that felt comfortable," said Corey.

COLLABORATION FEEDS CHANGE

For Daniel, it's all about listening to neighbors to spark hope and start real change.

Based on feedback from its community, City of Refuge has used more than $120,000 in Maryland Food Bank grants to support workforce development programs and improve the spaces where neighbors interact.

"The Maryland Food Bank helped make it possible for the trickle-down effect to happen. People say 'Hey, if Corey has a safe space here, if Corey can come here, then it's good for all of us,' and that gives us a lot of credibility," said Daniel.

"It doesn't happen with just City of Refuge, and it doesn't happen with just Corey. It happens with us working together to show people that a change could come about."

CITY OF REFUGE

MFB Partner Since 2014

1.3M Meals Shared in FY25

Robust Wraparound Services

Since 2019, City of Refuge has received three Maryland Food Bank grants totaling more than $120,000 to improve the spaces where neighbors interact and support their workforce development programs.

2x

Doubling the Recipe for Success:

The FoodWorks Culinary Training Program

Since 2010, FoodWorks has offered neighbors a safe space—a trusted destination where they can feed their dream of working in the culinary industry.

During FoodWorks' intensive twelve-week program, professional chefs guide students through "knife skills and life skills"—as well as providing career development skills, job placement assistance, and social services support—preparing them to thrive in any hospitality setting.

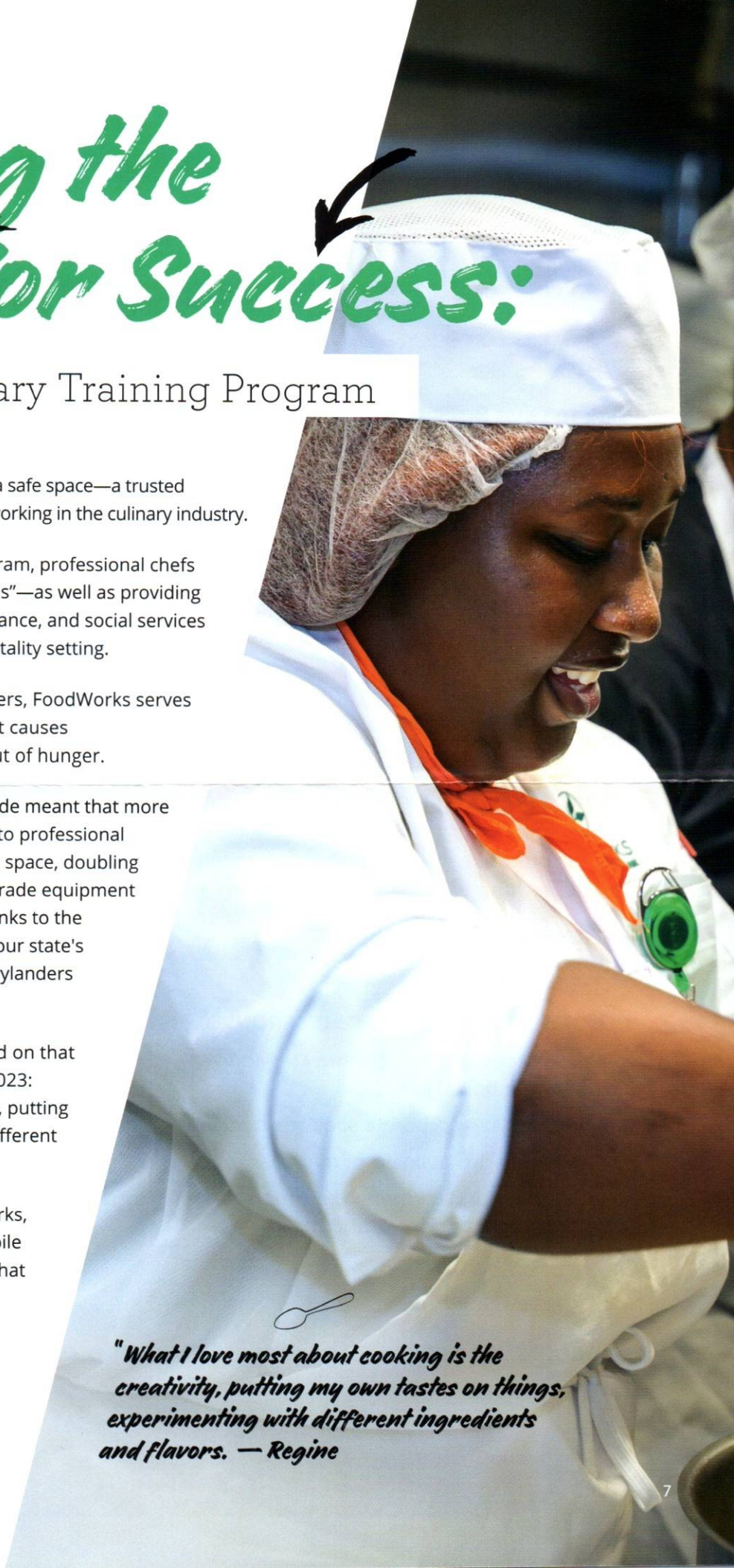
By helping Marylanders find good-paying careers, FoodWorks serves a critical role in MFB's work to address the root causes of food insecurity and open more pathways out of hunger.

The success of the program during its first decade meant that more than 500 neighbors transformed themselves into professional chefs. That's why we literally expanded the safe space, doubling the kitchen and filling it with new commercial-grade equipment like that found in professional kitchens—all thanks to the generosity of The Middendorf Foundation and our state's philanthropic community. Now, even more Marylanders have the opportunity to feed their dreams.

Marylanders like Regine Lafontant, who trained on that equipment, graduating as part of Class 41 in 2023: "What I love most about cooking is the creativity, putting my own tastes on things, experimenting with different ingredients and flavors," said Regine.

Just three short years after graduating FoodWorks, Regine owns and operates Rae's Kitchen, a mobile eatery that reflects that love by serving dishes that fuse the flavors of her parents' homelands of Trinidad (Mom) and Haiti (Dad).

Learn more about how FoodWorks' safe space is helping more Marylanders turn up the heat on their futures by visiting MFBFoodWorks.org.



"What I love most about cooking is the creativity, putting my own tastes on things, experimenting with different ingredients and flavors. — Regine

SAVE THE DATE

Friday, October 30

New this year: One Shift from 9 am to 12 pm

Pack to Give Back is Maryland's premier year-end event that brings our community together to assemble holiday meals to help feed our neighbors in need.

Corporate Sponsorship opportunities available

mdfoodbank.org/packtogiveback

Pack to Give Back is a true win-win for Transamerica, supporting our community while strengthening our teams. We're proud to help provide Thanksgiving meals to neighbors in need, and the experience brings our colleagues together in a meaningful way. It's something we look forward to every year.

— JENNA HALL | TRANSAMERICA

BECOME A PACK TO GIVE BACK SPONSOR, AND:

- **Expand** food access to more Marylanders during the holidays
- **Advance** your corporate social responsibility agenda
- **Promote** team building at a fun, feel good event
- **Increase** brand awareness through event signage, social media channels, and more!

Contact Mary Wright to get the partnership started: mwright@mdfoodbank.org

To **support our mission** of feeding people, strengthening communities, and ending hunger for more Marylanders, please visit **mdfoodbank.org/donate**

mdfoodbank.org

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